

## The Brown vine snake *Ahaetulla pulverulenta* (Duméril, Bibron & Duméril, 1854) in the Sundarbans, Bangladesh – first record from the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent

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So far the uncommon Brown vine snake *Ahaetulla pulverulenta* was known to occur in India along the Western Ghats from Gujarat to Kerala (Whitaker and Captain, 2004) and in Sri Lanka (Somaweera, 2006). The snake is characterized by a dark brown rhomboidal mark on top of the head, a stripe passing through the eye, and an extremely pointed head with an enlarged nose tip. The pale parts of the body look like ‘powdered’ with dust.

Recently, when inspecting our snake photographs from different travels to the Sundarbans in Bangladesh, we identified three different individuals of the Brown vine snake. Photographs of this species from Bangladesh were misidentified in earlier publications (Khan 2008, p.233; Denzau et al. 2009, p.138) as the brown morph of the common Green vine snake *Ahaetulla nasuta*.

Our specimens were all found in the Sundarbans East Sanctuary at about 21.9 °N, 89.8 ° E in the low salinity zone of the mangrove forest in the Gangetic delta, less than a kilometer from the Bay of Bengal (15. Jan. 2008, 13/14. Oct. 2009 and 13. Dec. 2009). Some of our photographs show the underside of the snake, with a dark line along the belly, as it is also visible in Khan (2008). The portrait (Fig. 1) was used as drawing-copy to trace the scales of the head (Fig. 2) as far as visible in the photograph. The tongue colouration seen in Fig. 1 increases the mimetic function of the head colour pattern.

The newly discovered *A. pulverulenta* population in the Sundarbans is located almost 2000 km farther east than the formerly known easternmost point of distribution (Fig. 3). The Brown vine snake is the first record for the herpetofauna of Bangladesh, not listed in the latest and most comprehensive book on amphibians and reptiles for the country (Kabir et al., 2009). Taxonomists will have to find out, if the Brown vine

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Figure 1. Photograph of *Ahaetulla pulverulenta* from the Sundarbans, Bangladesh.

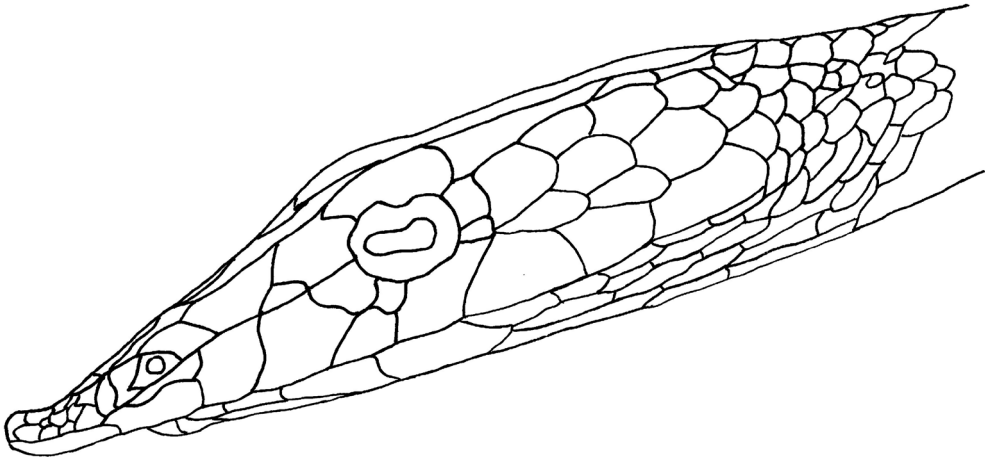


Figure 2. Lateral view of head scales drawn from figure 1.

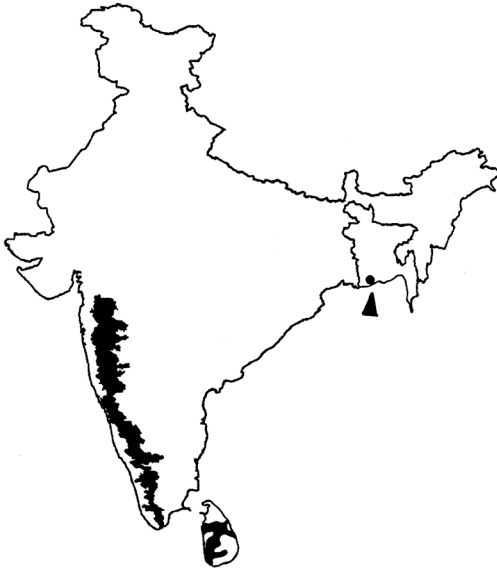


Figure 3. Distribution map for *Ahaetulla pulverulenta* in India (after Whitaker and Captain, 2004) and Sri Lanka (modified after Somaweera, 2006), with an arrow indicating the new record for Bangladesh.

snake in the Sundarbans eventually represents a separate subspecies or even a distinct species. Other questions to be solved: Is the distribution really as discontinuous as it appears now? And how far is the distribution extended in the northeast of the Indian subcontinent?

### References

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